



MUMBAI

American Center Bulletin

DECEMBER

2006

HIRING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES – GOOD FOR BUSINESS

In 1998, a Belgian student named Sacha Klein left Brussels to spend a semester at a U.S. university. He ended up enrolling as a four-year student, graduating with a computer-science degree, and landing a summer internship at Virginia-based consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton, where management liked him enough to offer him a full-time position. Today, he designs information systems for Booz Allen, studies toward a Master's degree in Business, and dreams of someday being his own boss.

He is deaf.

"This is truly the land of opportunity," Klein said in a conversation using an instant-messenger computer program. "Employers do not look at your disability, but at your abilities."

Since the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which obligated government agencies to hire people with disabilities, Congress has passed 11 major laws to improve access to education, transportation, technology, and housing. In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) opened the door for people like Klein to contribute to the U.S. economy in ways no one imagined before.

ADA is a civil rights law that bars discrimination by employers. It requires businesses to make accommodations to allow a person with a disability to do a job for which he or she is qualified. This might mean giving a diabetic breaks during the workday to check his blood-sugar level or providing software for a blind person to use a computer.

In addition to workplace accommodations, ADA requires public facilities to remove architectural barriers that hinder people with disabilities from shopping, going to the theater, or using public toilets.

Some experts believe such widespread architectural changes have put the United States ahead of the 44 other countries with disability-discrimination laws. Katherine McCary, a vice president of SunTrust Banks Inc. and president of a business group that promotes hiring people with disabilities, said European managers tell her they want to hire people with disabilities, but that they can't get to work. "ADA did a lot for us, in terms of creating access into and out of buildings," McCary said.

Roy Grizzard, assistant secretary of labor, has held

recent seminars in EU countries and Vietnam on architectural solutions. "Curb cuts [ramps from sidewalks to streets at intersections] almost everywhere and transportation accommodations ... allow people to go to work," he said.

Klein thinks attitudes matter, too. Had he stayed in Europe, he said, he would not have been able to become a white-collar professional, but would have been put on track for factory work.

While one can paint a rosy picture of U.S. companies embracing people with disabilities, in the early 1990s, ADA was greeted with panic by the business community, which predicted enormous costs and out-of-control litigation. A federal hotline offering advice on workplace accommodations went from handling 3,000 calls per year before the law to 40,000 calls per year in the mid-1990s.

The cost of accommodations turned out to be zero in half the cases and averaged about \$500 in the other half, according to the Labor Department. Employers report that workers with disabilities are loyal and productive, Grizzard said, so "balance that [\$500] with the cost of a good day's work for a good day's pay from a long-lasting employee."

As to lawsuits, Peter Susser, an attorney for the employment and labor law firm Littler Mendelson, said there still is a lot of litigation, despite court rulings narrowing the definition of disabled under the law. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which handles claims of discrimination under ADA, has received a steady stream of charges – averaging 16,000 per year and representing about one-fifth of all discrimination charges – since the law took effect. The government found 18 percent of the charges to have merit.

Beth Gaudio, of the National Federation of Independent Business, said much of the burden for small businesses today comes from state laws. The federal law's accommodation requirement applies to companies with 15 or more employees, but some state laws apply to firms of two. "It falls on the bookkeeper or the owner's spouse to figure out what needs to be done," Gaudio said.

It can be argued that compliance with the law is good for business too: 87 percent of consumers prefer to

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HOLIDAYS

December 25: Christmas Day

A WORD FROM THE CENTER

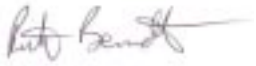
As the disability rights movement in the United States gained momentum, one of its slogans was “disabled still means able.”

More and more employers are finding the truth behind that catchphrase, and recognizing that the workplace modifications needed to employ people with disabilities are less extensive than they anticipated. As this month’s article points out, there’s good business sense to taking such steps and in unleashing the full potential of the available workforce.

In many ways, the integration of people with disabilities into the workplace mirrors the earlier struggle of women and people of color. And just as labor barriers began to fall only as people realized that race or sex had nothing to do with professional, intellectual and creative achievement, the biggest obstacles people with disabilities face in the office are less to do with physical access and more to do with overcoming the preconceived ideas of their colleagues.

In this way, the push for labor inclusion for people with disabilities is not only an economic issue, but a human rights one as well. Workplace equality will follow when people are comfortable with the notion that disabled doesn’t mean diminished. Disability-rights activists have a phrase that captures that sentiment, too, when they refer to people with disabilities as “differently-abled.”

Businesses and policymakers alike place a great premium on the ability to “think outside the box.” Within an organization, that goal can be achieved through diversity in human resources, allowing the institution to draw upon a rich mix of backgrounds and perspectives. Considering how resistant some of the complex and large-scale problems facing the world today have been to conventional solutions, the differently-abled may turn out to be just the difference we need.



Ruth Bennett
Deputy Director

WELCOME



Christine Dal Bello arrived in Mumbai on October 23, 2006, to assume the new position of Media Officer. She has been in the Foreign Service since 2001, and earlier served in Jakarta as a Consular Officer, as well as in Vienna where she was an Economic-Political Officer. Christine also spent six months in 2005 working on counternarcotics in Afghanistan. She has a B.A. in History and International Studies from Yale University. Prior to joining the Foreign Service, she worked in legal marketing in Asia for four years.

DECEMBER IN THE UNITED STATES

Anniversary: Basketball Created (December 1, 1891)

James Naismith was a teacher of physical education at the International YMCA Training School at Springfield, Massachusetts. To create an indoor sport that could be played during the winter months, he nailed up peach baskets at opposite ends of the gym and gave students soccer balls to toss into them. Thus was born the game of basketball.

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patronize companies that hire people with disabilities, according to a January 2006 survey by the University of Massachusetts. In addition, workers with disabilities could help relieve a labor shortage. In the next eight years, 36 million Americans will be eligible to retire and leave the workforce. Census Bureau reports indicate that nearly half of the 33 million working-age people with disabilities were unemployed as of 2000.

“The ADA ... was an important beginning, but in no way an end,” said Tom Ridge, the chairman of the board of the National Organization on Disability and former governor of Pennsylvania. Businesses have policies to comply with ADA, but need to step up recruitment, Ridge’s organization believes.

The Department of Labor encourages disability-friendly companies with annual awards, and *DiversityInc* magazine recently published its first list of “top ten companies for people with disabilities.”

Five thousand businesses have formed chapters of a U.S. Business Leadership Network in 32 states to foster hiring people with disabilities. Through that network, the Booz Allen internship program that attracted Sacha Klein expanded in 2003 to include dozens of other companies and in 2006, to locate internships beyond Washington and New York.

The Cincinnati Children’s Hospital recently decided to imitate a year-long mentorship program that SunTrust’s banks offer to students with developmental disabilities. Executives from the national drugstore chain CVS Corporation met with the Labor Department’s Ray Grizzard in October 2006 to discuss plans to introduce people with disabilities to pharmacy occupations. The Marriott Foundation for People With Disabilities, established by the founder of Marriott International, the hotel operator/franchisor, has formed links with several companies to train and place high-school graduates with disabilities in jobs.

Small companies are taking the leap too. Seven of the 20 employees at Michigan manufacturer A&F Wood Products have disabilities. The company has rebuilt workstations, provided job coaches and special software, reconfigured telephones, and adjusted work schedules.

Companies hiring workers with disabilities do it for business reasons. They say they gain valuable employees who, often because of their disabilities, are skilled at planning ahead or communicating creatively.

Klein said he has learned a lot at Booz Allen about teamwork and communication. But early on, he himself shared communication tips with colleagues. He asked them to speak one at a time at meetings and to look at him, not at his sign-language interpreter, when speaking to him. “They learn fast once you educate them a little bit,” he said.

Elizabeth Kelleher is a staff writer for the U.S. Department of State in the Bureau of International Information Programs.

Spotlight: How One Company Approaches Disability

Technology has changed all our lives, but perhaps has had the most impact on persons with disabilities, opening new worlds of communication, access, work, and education. With the current estimate of more than 54 million people in the United States with some form of disability, people with disabilities and their caregivers and family members are a highly attractive market. Microsoft realizes that to understand this

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group, to know what will meet their needs, and to know how to reach them, the company can benefit from the insights provided by employees with disabilities.

If you use the Microsoft Encarta encyclopedia and look up the “I Have a Dream” speech of Martin Luther King Jr., you will be able to hear his voice giving the speech. But you can also see the text written across the bottom of the screen. This addition, unique for this type of product, makes Encarta more useful to many customers and potential customers. Adding closed captioning to Encarta was the suggestion of a Microsoft employee who is deaf. This is only one example of the kind of contribution employees with disabilities can make to product development and marketing.

Microsoft has developed a multifaceted strategy to attract and retain qualified employees, including employees with disabilities, and to help them create products and services for people of all abilities. The company participates each year in National Disability Mentoring Day to help introduce students with disabilities to the world of work, and Microsoft encourages employees with disabilities to be involved. Students with disabilities often have had fewer opportunities to spend time in a work place, talking to professionals doing the kind of work in which they are interested, and even fewer opportunities to see people with their kind of disability succeeding in their target career. The mentoring program fills this need, while serving as an important element of Microsoft’s outreach to this employee pool.

Like most companies, Microsoft has a recruitment program to attract talented individuals, including those with disabilities. But recruiters were sometimes concerned about how to approach these students, how to communicate with them, and how to make sure the team that conducted subsequent interviews was prepared to appreciate the candidates’ qualifications. Microsoft developed training for their recruiters to smooth this process. But their efforts did not stop there.

According to Mylene Padolina, Microsoft’s senior diversity consultant, the company goes on to ensure that the workplace is fully prepared for the new employee. She interviews the new hires to find out what equipment and other accommodations they will need to do their jobs. The office groups or teams they will be joining receive briefings about the needs arising from the new employee’s disability. There is a plan in place to ease the transition into the work environment for the new employee. Padolina says this allows the employee to be as productive as possible quickly and helps team members focus on the tasks of the office, not questions about the disability.

Accommodation can include special furniture or special computer programs or hardware, such as screen readers for the blind that produce the material on screen in spoken form or on a Braille display. Plans are made to make work meetings comfortable and productive and to be sure everyone is included, even in the more social team-building events. If the employee is blind, for example, team members will be coached on how to provide guidance from time to time to help the new employee move around. For teams gaining a deaf member, training will be offered in American Sign Language.

Microsoft has developed a coordinated approach to recruiting and employing people with disabilities; but it has not done this alone, nor does it have all the answers. For more than 15 years, Microsoft has partnered with the National Business and Disability Council to create

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NOTES FROM THE AMERICAN LIBRARY

A Select Webliography on Disability

<http://www.aapd.com/>

American Association of People with Disabilities

<http://www.acb.org/>

American Council of the Blind

<http://codi.buffalo.edu/>

Cornucopia Of Disability Information

<http://www.dredf.org/>

Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund

<http://www.helenkeller.org/>

Helen Keller Services for the Blind

http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/index.php/Disability_law

Legal Information Institute – Disability Law

<http://www.loc.gov/nls/>

The Library of Congress – National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped

<http://www.nbdcc.com/>

National Business & Disability Council

<http://www.ncddr.org/>

National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research

<http://www.ncd.gov/>

National Council on Disability

<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration – National Mental Health Information Center

<http://www.nyise.org/>

The New York Institute for Special Education

<http://www.ncd.gov/mental.htm>

National Council on Disability – State Mental Health Agencies

<http://www.access-board.gov/>

United States Access Board

<http://www.hhs.gov/od/index.html>

United States Department of Health & Human Services – Office on Disability

<http://www.ada.gov/>

U.S. Department of Justice – Americans with Disabilities Act

<http://www.dol.gov/dol/topic/disability/index.htm>

U.S. Department of Labor – Disability Resources

<http://www.drc.dot.gov/>

U.S. Department of Transportation – Disability Resource Center

Note: Internet sites included in this listing, other than those of the U.S. Government, should not be construed as an endorsement of the views contained therein.

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the Able to Work Consortium, and it is a member of Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities (COSD). Padolina explains that this networking gives her resources for counsel when she faces a new issue and allows all participants to learn from the experiences of other members.

For its efforts, Microsoft has won numerous awards, including a New Freedom Initiative Award from the U.S. Department of Labor in 2004. In presenting the award, U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao noted that the company offers unique employment opportunities for job seekers with disabilities. The award also cited many of the achievements noted above. Learn more from Microsoft's 15-minute video, "Window of Opportunities" at <http://www.microsoft.com/about/corporatecitizenship/citizenship/diversity/inside/access.asp>.

Both articles above are excerpted from the November 2006, Department of State e-Journal, "Disability and Ability." This journal and many others can be viewed at <http://usinfo.state.gov/pub/ejournalusa.html>.

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National Sign Up For Summer Camp Month

Every year, more than ten million children continue a national tradition by attending day or resident camps. Building self-confidence, learning new skills and making memories that last a lifetime are just a few examples of what makes camp special and why camp does children a world of good. To find the right program, parents begin looking at summer camps during this month – and sign their children up while there are still vacancies.

National Stress-Free Family Holidays Month

The holidays are so fraught with busy schedules that families often miss out on quality time together because outside demands have left them virtually drained. This observance is a reminder for parents to strive for more stress-free holidays for their families.

National Tie Month

Annually in December, 20 percent of all ties sold are bought as Christmas gifts. This observance is to celebrate the tie and promote its proper use.

Anniversary: Safety Razor Patented (December 2, 1901)

American King Camp Gillette designed the first razor with disposable blades. Up until this time, men shaved with a straight-edge razor that they sharpened on a leather strap.

Special Education Day (December 2)

Celebrate the anniversary of the first U.S. special education law – December 2, 1975. A time to reflect and move forward. Where were we when President Ford signed the groundbreaking legislation? Where are we now? And where do we need to be tomorrow? A day to visit schools, honor progress and dialogue.

National Day of the Horse (December 9)

The horse is a living link to the heritage and history of our nation, and represents a common bond among all peoples who led the way in building our country. Today, the horse industry contributes more than \$112 billion annually to the American economy. Therefore, the California State Legislature (as well as the U.S. Senate) has declared the second Saturday of December to be the Day of the Horse in honor of these magnificent creatures.

Source: Chase's 2006 Calendar of Events

MUMBAI MONDAYS

**A Discussion on
Civilian Oversight of Police
led by Amanda Zafian**

**Monday, December 18
American Center Auditorium**

6:00 p.m.

In 1994, New York City created one of the first agencies where civilians – not members of the police department – oversaw allegations of brutality and corruption in the police department. Since that time, with the NYC office as a model, similar civilian-based agencies have sprouted up all around America. They also have started to exist internationally in places such as Canada, Holland, the UK, and Brazil, and each year there are international conferences on police accountability around the globe. The idea of ensuring police accountability by means of civilian oversight reflects the principles of democratic governing systems, and mirrors the checks and balances often in place within those systems, particularly in the United States.

Amanda Zafian is in Mumbai as a Consular Officer. She is originally from New York City, where she worked for the New York City Civilian Complaint Review Board, but has also studied elsewhere in the United States. She holds Master's degrees in English Literature, Journalism and International Affairs.

FILMS THIS MONTH

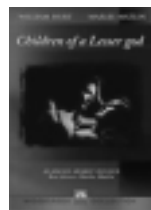
DISABILITY RIGHTS

Friday, December 15 *Children of a Lesser God* (1986, color, 118 mins)

Friday, December 22 *A Beautiful Mind* (2001, color, 136 mins)

American Center Auditorium

3:30 and 6:30 p.m. each day



William Hurt stars as an unconventional teacher of the deaf who falls in love with a withdrawn school worker (Best Actress Oscar-winner Marlee Matlin) in this acclaimed drama based on the hit play. Hurt's attempts to teach Matlin lipreading and his imposing of his ideas on her life threaten to tear the couple apart. Piper Laurie costars.

Winner of four Academy Awards – including Best Picture, Director and Supporting Actress – Ron Howard's compelling, real-life drama centers on John Forbes Nash (Russell Crowe), a mathematical genius whose decades-long fight with schizophrenia threatened his marriage and academic career, until his redemption came in the form of a Nobel Prize in 1994. Jennifer Connelly costars as Crowe's understanding wife Alicia, Ed Harris is a "government agent" who contracts him to break Cold War codes, and Christopher Plummer is the psychiatrist who tries to help him.



Admission to all American Center programs, restricted to persons over 16, will be on a first-come, first-served basis. Please bring the envelope containing this issue of the bulletin for admission (maximum two persons). The auditorium doors will open 30 minutes before the start of the program.

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